



Florence County School **District Four**

Board Chair, Trustee Lillie Mae Joe

Statement of the Facts from

The Florence County School District Four Board of Trustees

Regarding the Meritless and Unjust Public Reprimand of

Dr. Rechel M. Anderson, Former Superintendent

By the South Carolina State Board of Education

Statement of the Facts from the Florence Four Board: No Longer Silent (9/16/2019)

We, Florence School District Four Board of Trustees (Mrs. Lillie Mae Joe, Ms. Brenda McKithen, Ms. Deidra Thomas, and Mr. Henry Anderson), waited silently for this very moment. The moment is here and we will no longer retreat in silence!

May 9, 2018 is a day we will never forget because it was the day the state superintendent made her announcement that she was taking over Florence School District Four. She cited the reasons for the takeover were due to continued financial issues and the inability to sustain the district financially. Secondly, she stripped the Board of Trustees of all duties and constitutional rights as elected officials. We, Florence School District Four Board of Trustees, will really never know the real reason for her decision because from May 9, 2018 until the present; we have never had the opportunity to speak to the state superintendent.

We have remained silent because we did not want our actions to harm our former superintendent, Dr. Rechel M. Anderson. The superintendent that, WE, as a Florence Four Board, were bullied by the state superintendent, Molly Spearman, to hire. For example, the viewpoint shared by Superintendent Phyllis Schwarting, Bamberg School District 1, "They were told that if they refuse to consolidate, state Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman has been given the authority by the state legislators to withhold all state and federal funds from the district (July 23, 2019 T&D Article Bamberg School District 1: Consolidation: 'Our hands...are tied'). This was the same overview WE were told as well if we did NOT hire Dr. Anderson.

However, much to our surprise, Dr. Anderson was the best superintendent for our district. The very superintendent that we loved, supported, valued, and trusted because her actions spoke volumes. The very superintendent that we believed was the best superintendent we had ever had in our district. **However, at this moment, and after watching the media attack and defame the character of Dr. Rechel M. Anderson, we can no longer sit in silence!** While, we may have been overtaken by Molly Spearman and not permitted to meet as a board, we are still elected officials. Therefore, we have a right to exercise our voices as elected officials.

Let us be clear, the state takeover was a surprise to say the least. However, how it was done was even more of a surprise. It should be stated that a primary reason that the takeover was a surprise was due to the fact that we were meeting every component of the MOA (Memorandum of Agreement) between the district and the state under the leadership of Dr. Rechel M. Anderson. We, as a district, accomplished the following: AdvancED Accreditation, improved test scores, increased focused on instruction, high accountability, and a superintendent who cared about children.

Further, a fiscal caution meeting was conducted just a few weeks, at the state department, prior to the announcement of the state takeover. The meeting was a very pleasant and positive meeting. During this meeting, the state superintendent led members of the Florence Four District: our legal representation, the district auditor, the district's finance consultant, board

chair, and superintendent that all was well, and praised Dr. Anderson for her leadership and hard work. Hence, why the takeover was a surprise.

Quite frankly, not only was the takeover a surprise, but the manner in which our board was treated was unethical, and the manner in which our former superintendent was treated, Dr. Rachel M. Anderson, was inhumane.

Dr. Anderson was NEVER reprimanded by the Florence Four Board of Trustees and she was NOT reprimanded by the state department. Further, there were NO complaints from staff, parents, or students that were brought to the attention of the school board. Nor did the state department share any concerns about Dr. Anderson. It should be noted that Florence Four always had lively board meetings. If there was a problem with Dr. Anderson, we can assure you that it would have been revealed. Why? Because there were two community individuals who always attended the board meetings and voiced their opinion and any concern. In fact, the staff would reach out to these two community members. Let's test the water! We encourage you to pull a few of Florence Four Board Meeting Minutes. To be exact, pull the minutes of October 2018, November 2018 and December 2018. The two community members who were always present to speak on any issues in Florence Four shared their concerns (e.g. "Why are we paying two superintendents?", "How can we afford to pay Zona Jefferson \$165,000?"). Pull the minutes.

To watch Dr. Anderson go through the ridicule and humiliation created by the alleged allegations of the State Department of Education is simply baseless, unprofessional, and should not be permitted. We provided testimony at the hearing on the behalf of Dr. Anderson. However, you would not know that by the article that was released by the Island Packet or the recent media releases. The only portion of the article in the Island Packet that is accurate; is that Dr. Anderson did NOT have any disciplinary actions against her. Therefore, she should NOT have any against her now or a public reprimand!

Let's be clear, these allegations do not pass the 'smell test.' Maybe someone should truly chart a timeline of all the occurrences and somewhere in that timeline...maybe the truth will show its face. What we can be clear of is the following:

- 1.) **Verbal Altercation:** There is absolutely no record, video, or media clip of a verbal altercation between Dr. Anderson and an employee that led to Dr. Anderson being physically restrained. In fact, the employee in which she was said to have had a verbal altercation with denied the altercation occurred. Yes, that is in the testimony of several individuals who testified on the behalf of Dr. Anderson. For those who are judging Dr. Anderson by what the media has released; you should dig deeper and demand the video! Demand the evidence! Demand the statement from the alleged victim! Why didn't Dr. Anderson receive some type of formal write-up for such an incident? Where was the SRO? Why was there NOT a complaint filed?

- 2.) **Leave:** I, the board chair of Florence School District Four, Mrs. Lillie Mae Joe, encouraged Dr. Anderson to take her comp leave for any time she had to be away from the office because Dr. Anderson could be found working early hours, late hours and weekends. She was also asked to report any time away from work to me, the board chair. She did what she was asked of her to do. Also, I testified to the same. Why wasn't that published? Therefore, she did not take any time away from work that she had not earned or was told to do so.
- 3.) **Falsifying a Personnel Report:** The Board of Trustees is NOT aware of any personnel report falsified by Dr. Anderson. Dr. Anderson shared with us that she created a report to depict the current status, at the time, of the department. Therefore, she took a report that was given to her by the Director of Human Resources, Beverly Flythe, and created her own report. But that is not falsifying a document. A document can't be falsified if you are the one who created the document. Again, this was NEVER shared with, US, as a board. If it wasn't important then; how is it important one year later?
- 4.) **Lying about Where She Was When Interviewing in Jasper:** Dr. Anderson did not lie about where she was when absent. In fact, Dr. Anderson informed, me, Mrs. Lillie Mae Joe, the board chair where she was at all times. In this case, Molly Spearman had already informed Dr. Anderson she would not have a job after June 30, 2018. Therefore, Dr. Anderson interviewed for a job and did inform the board chair. Who in their right mind, if you know you will not have a job, would not interview for a job?
- 5.) **Requested Pay-out Of Leave:** This is not true. Request the documentation from the state that reveals that Dr. Anderson requested pay-out for leave. You will find that Dr. Anderson's signature is NOT on any document because Dr. Anderson never returned to Florence School District Four after June 1, 2018; when Molly Spearman contacted her, prior to graduation, and informed her that she was being released and June 1, 2018 was her last day in Florence Four. Request the text message from Molly Spearman, Langston Brown, and Dr. Anderson pertaining to this matter. Oh, there is a text message because Dr. Anderson shared it with us because we did not understand why she was not returning.
- 6.) **Didn't return to the District After Students were Shot:** Dr. Anderson was touring schools in Jasper County School District. She contacted her designee, Dr. Michelle Heyward and secretary to ensure everything was in place. Further, it was a ½ day of school, the students were NOT shot at school, but the incident occurred the night before at the student's home. Did Molly Spearman attend the student's funeral? She was, after all, in charge, because she released Dr. Anderson June 1, 2018 in a text message. How is it an issue if Dr. Anderson did not return to the district, but ensured her designee was onsite? But, Molly Spearman did NOT attend the student's funeral, but her designee, Latoya Dixon was there. Why isn't Molly Spearman before the state board of education for not attending the student's funeral? Where was she? Isn't her behavior or lack of; unprofessional conduct?

- 7.) **Hired an individual she was told not to hire:** Check the evidence the state has; you will see that Dr. Anderson did not hire anyone and that Zona Jefferson was aware the individual was in the district as a consultant because she signed the paycheck. Dr. Anderson did inform the individual that Molly Spearman wanted him to leave the district, but Molly Spearman never gave Dr. Anderson a date that the individual had to be gone. Also, Dr. Anderson informed the board of this action. In fact, the board question Dr. Anderson as to why this individual had to leave. Again, ask for the evidence that Dr. Anderson defied a directive. What was the date Dr. Anderson was given to have the individual gone from the campus? Where is that in writing?
- 8.) **Advised Staff that the State Superintendent and Latoya Dixon didn't need to know everything:** This is absolutely untrue! It wasn't Dr. Anderson that said this, but the former interim superintendent, Zona Jefferson. She informed, we, the board of this all the time. In fact, she also said the same to staff.

Finally, the Florence Four Board of Trustees do believe that Dr. Anderson is entitled to her severance package because her contract was unilaterally terminated by Molly Spearman, NOT the Florence Four Board. We would also like to add that one of the individuals who assisted with digging for untruths in regards to Dr. Anderson, Beverly Flythe, is employed by the state department. She was in Sumter School District and from the board's knowledge, she was interviewing for one job and was then placed in another by the interim superintendent; but did she have issues in Sumter?

There are many other matters that the Florence Four Board of Trustees have dealt with pertaining to the hiring and firing of previous superintendents, and in the midst there was always one board member who continued to perform unethical acts and the state superintendent supported him. In fact, he would state, "Molly is my girl!" This same board member testified against Dr. Anderson, but this board member should be investigated. There are many issues that relate to his conduct and underhanded deals that were made while in office.

We, will NOT let the good works of Dr. Anderson be ill-spoken of because of a select group of individuals who did not like being held accountable. Some of these same individuals are still working for Florence School District Four...investigate their success with students. You should also investigate an individual who was once employed in the Finance Department, who testified against Dr. Anderson, but resigned when Dr. Anderson reassigned her to a different position. Dr. Anderson did make the board aware of this matter. Start by asking for the individual's personnel file.

It amazes us that we have yet to have a face-to-face meeting with the state superintendent since her announcement of the takeover on May 9, 2018; although, a request was made. Were we NOT good enough to at least have a face-to-face meeting? Does the state superintendent have so much POWER that it can be used to belittle elected officials?

We MAY not have been viewed as a powerful elected body of board members, and maybe we waited too long to let our voices be heard; but we have the courage and the ability to stand for what is right! It is right to defend Dr. Anderson because WE know the truth, and what has been exploited in the media about Dr. Anderson is NOT the truth!

It is apparent that this matter is a personal attack on Dr. Anderson. We are NOT fooled by the notion that it wasn't until after the takeover that individuals came forward with issues. We, Florence Four Board Members, live in Timmonsville. We know many of the staff employed in Florence Four. We hear about several matters in Florence Four. We also know who the people are that are always in the middle of what we call 'mess.' Take the time to research previous superintendents and connect the dots. We can assure you that in the center of the demise of those superintendents are the same individuals who continue to look for negativity and a way to continue operating as usual.

WE stand behind our statement and WE know what is factual and what is NOT! WE know how we were treated by Molly Spearman. WE know all too well! It should also be noted, WE, are NOT disgruntled or upset about the takeover. In fact, WE support what is best for the students in Florence Four. However, WE do NOT support the way WE were treated by Molly Spearman or the way that Molly Spearman has sought to hurt Dr. Anderson. One may have power due to an office or resources to support their power in office, but one should NOT be permitted to abuse their power in office to hurt people, and make statements that degrade people! WE, are NOT only elected officials! WE, are human beings! Dr. Anderson is a human being! This process was unethical to say the least and the treatment of US, as elected officials, was also unethical. **It is time for the South Carolina School Board Association to step up and fight for its School Board Members! This treatment has to stop! How long will the attacks on school districts, school boards, and specific superintendents be allowed? Who is next?**

Dr. Anderson was and is a great leader, person, educator and superintendent! The truth is that the alleged allegations against her are false and that is FACT! WE employ you, those in power and those with resources, take the time and speak with Dr. Anderson. Dig deeper! This professional educator was mistreated and someone or several individuals should be 'called on the carpet.' Something in the wash is NOT clean!

WE encourage the Jasper County School Board to use their voice and continue to stand up and defend your superintendent, Dr. Rechel M. Anderson.

No Longer Silent: Florence Four Board Members

Ms. Lille Mae Joe Lille Mae Joe (843) 246-1719

Ms. Brenda McKithen Brenda McKithen

Ms. Deidra Thomas Deidra Thomas

Mr. Henry Anderson

Mr. Henry Anderson